

THE PRINCIPAL MONUMENTS  
OF SPAIN

XIII

THE MEZQUITA OF  
CORDOVA  
AND MADINAT AL-ZAHRA

by

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*A translation of both the text and captions  
of the illustrations*

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MADRID (Spain)



*Oh lofty wall! Oh towers crowned  
with honour, majesty and valor!  
Oh you great river, King of Andalusia,  
of noble, if not golden sands!*

*To see your wall, your towers and your river,  
your plains and mountains—oh my native country!  
Flower of Spain!*

GÓNGORA.

This marvellous city of Cordova, ten centuries ago the most important western centre of wealth, culture and population; those quiet, silent, narrow streets of her old part, exhale a subtle perfume of refined grandeur which has outlasted a thousand years of turmoil and vicissitude.

A highly sensitive modern poet has described her—distant and alone<sup>1</sup>—in words that evoke the melancholy atmosphere of a declining town on the banks of the Guadalquivir, dreamily living on memories of past glory and splendour.

The fundamental reason of Cordova's existence may be attributed to her great bridge, the crossing of the Via Augusta, one of the most important high-roads constructed by the Romans, a main artery traversing the Peninsula from north-east to south-west and linking Narbonne with Cádiz. The town, which had necessarily to be passed through, was, furthermore, situated in the centre of a fertile, corn-producing plain and had available in its neighbourhood mountainous regions of good and abundant pasture land. The greatness of Roman Corduba may be judged from the remains casually discovered in recent times, when laying the foundations of new buildings or opening ditches for

underground services, and which include mosaics, mutilated statues, architectural fragments of large constructions. No traces are left of the Imperial city; her ruins destroyed and calcined, lie submerged in the soil at depths ranging from four to five metres. History tells us nothing of the catastrophes, the tragic events which occurred between the 4th and the 8th century and were able to produce the total disappearance of the Roman town and the accumulation of such enormous masses of sand and rubble.

In the 8th century, a few years after the invasion and rapid conquest of the Peninsula by the Moslems, the latter established their Capital at Cordova, which never stopped growing from then onwards; while new naves and columns were added to the great mosque, the Mezquita. The city attained its highest splendour under two great sovereigns, the caliphs Abd al-Rahman III (912-961) and his son al-Hakim II (961-976), and preserved it during the nominal government of Hisham II (976-1009) and the de facto government of Almanzor, until the first years of the 11th century.

The first of these monarchs was a great leader, an exceptional politician and organizer, to whom Islamic Spain owed her

order and prosperity. Al-Hakim, a man of culture and refinement, was able to develop his intellectual qualities within an atmosphere of peace and general well-being thanks to his father and predecessor's solid work of administration. Almanzor's outstanding military talent permitted the maintenance of unity among the complex mosaic of peoples and religions constituting Islamic Spain at the end of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th.

During the reign of Abd al-Rahman III, Cordova was the largest, wealthiest and most cultured city of the West. Her prestige was only to be compared with that of great Constantinople: at the time Queen of the civilised world and heiress of the scientific, artistic and philosophic patrimony of Greece and the Hellenic East, as well as of Roman greatness. Her rival was legendary Abasside Bagdad, the metropolis of the Moslem world, with which the Cordovese aspired to make their home town vie.

Reports of the greatness of the Andalusian city even reached distant Germany, where, during the second half of the 10th century, Nun Roswitha, in the solitude of a Saxon convent cell, considered Cordova the most brilliant ornament and jewel of the world. Johann von Görz, Ambassador of Otto I at the court of the Caliphs, expressed his amazement at her elegance and splendour.

During the reign of Abd al-Rahman II, engineers, builders and architects already began to travel from Byzantium and Bagdad to Cordova. From Byzantium, the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus sent, among other presents of great value, a copy of Dioscorides' "Botany" and of Paulus Orosius' "Histories" to Abd al-Rahman III around 948, and a little later he commissioned the monk Nicholas, who arrived at Cordova in 951, to translate the Greek text of the "Botany". Al-Hakim II asked the same Byzantine monarch a few years later for some pieces of polychrome glass and the despatch of an artist to mount them in the mosaic decorations of his enlargement of the Cordova mosque.

According to an anonymous Arab poet, there were four things in which Cordova excelled over all other Capitals in the world: her bridge over the Guadalquivir, the great Mosque, the Madinat al-Zahra palace and, foremost of all, her science.<sup>2</sup>

If we refrain from quoting hyperbolic figures given by authors of the 10th century

and later times, whose correctness it has not so far been possible to verify, a conservative estimate may assign to Cordova, already in full decline, a population of some 50,000 around 1125, as against about 100,000 in the 10th century. In order to understand the real significance of these figures, it should be borne in mind that in the rest of contemporary Europe, still mostly in the throes of barbarism, the level of culture was lower than it had been for several centuries, and rustic life predominated. In that century of Cordova's greatest splendour, a still very small number of Italian and Flemish towns, hardly renascent, started on an active commercial life; their great demographic progress developing from the 11th to the 13th century, when only memories remained of caliphal Cordova's greatness.

During the 10th century, agriculture, industry and commerce made great progress and rose to high prosperity in Islamic Spain; among the population of Cordova, the centre and crucible of cultural refinement, which united men of many races and religions, not a few were able to read and write. Schools were plentiful, and the great mosque was a famous teaching centre of theological and legal sciences. What the epochs of Pericles and Augustus represented for Greece and Rome respectively,—as asserted by don Ricardo Velázquez—was the Cordovan Caliphate for Spain.

During the first years of the 11th century, in the course of the strife leading to the downfall of the Caliphate, large parts of Cordova suffered destruction, as well as Madinat al-Zahra and almost all the orchards and palaces, which, surrounded by rich vegetation, had formed a flowery ring of splendid residences around the city.

Cordova, in profound decline, languished and was on the way to becoming a dead provincial town, only filled with shadows of a noble past. During the first half of the 12th century, her industry continued to produce exquisite works of art of such great value as the pulpit of the Kutubiyya mosque at Marrakesh. In the last years of that century, the Cordovan Averroes still praised before Sultan Yakub al-Mansur the greatness and culture of his native city and its superiority over Seville; whenever a scientist died in that town—he said—and his family had to sell his books, they would carry them to Cordova, where their sale was assured. In the 15th century, Fernán

Pérez de Guzmán called Cordova "another Athens."

The greatness of the Capital of the Caliphate, lost in the shadows of a thousand years, is still ostensibly proclaimed to-day by the Mezquita and the enormous field of ruins of Madinat al-Zahra, where excavations have been started quite recently. Of the former, don Manuel Gómez-Moreno has said that "since the age of the Menga cave to the present day, Spain has no other building to show which may be compared with it for originality or is as prolific an example of anything that did not come to us from Europe or of an expression of Spanish culture across the Mediterranean"<sup>3</sup>. To obtain a clear idea of Cordova's greatness in the 10th century, one only has to compare the Mezquita and the excavated ruins of the nearby city, stone-work of the most refined art created by the western mind fecundated by influences from Byzantium, Syria and Bagdad, and the small and modest buildings erected at the same time in the rest of western Europe, most of which were made of wood, clay or rubble and almost all but rudely decorated.

In addition to the great mosque, there only remain of 10th century Cordova the small minarets of three others; some baths saved from ruin owing to their solid vaulted construction; several curtains and towers of the wall and fortress; and fragments of the great Guadalquivir bridge, again and again rebuilt after countless and destructive spates.

#### THE MEZQUITA, HOUSE OF PRAYER.

The great mosque of Cordova, consecrated to Christian worship and converted into cathedral upon the conquest of the town by Ferdinand III in 1236, is the most beautiful Islamic house of prayer in East and West, no other one being comparable to it either in perfection of architectural style or in wealth of ornament. Originally dedicated to a form of worship different from our own, its artistic significance may be better understood if we devote some lines to the description of the ceremonies held in its interior.

The mosque is the Moslems' public place of prayer. It consists of one large room, generally low-roofed and of rectangular shape—preferring spaciousness to the loft-

iness of Christian churches—and divided into naves by rows of columns or pillars; of a courtyard in the foreground; and of a tower, the minaret. There always used to be next to it a more modestly built independent annex with a centre pool (*alberca*), surrounded by latrines and intended for ritual ablutions, as the faithful Mohammedans had to purify themselves before entering the room of prayer.

The mosque was—and in Islamic countries still is—fundamentally intended for the prayer, which consists in reciting the ritual profession of faith in God, whom Moslems call Allah, and in His prophet Mohammed, and some Koran verses. The faithful always stood facing towards Mecca. The direction is shown on one of the outer walls perpendicular to its axis and called "quibla". There is nearly always an arch opening in its centre to serve as an entrance to a small recess—like a shortened apse,—the "mihrab" whose only object is to indicate the direction in which the faithful have to turn when saying their prayers.

Little natural light entered into the interior of the mosques, especially when the naves were numerous, but glass and metal oil-lamps were suspended in great numbers from arches, roofs and vaults; some of them in the most important places such as the space in front of the mihrab—the most revered part of the oratory—were very large and divided into many small lamps.

The floor and the lower part of walls and columns or pillars was covered with esparto-grass mats.

In towns of a certain importance, there was a main mosque which all the Moslems were obliged to visit for prayer every Friday, their sabbath. If they found no room in the hall of prayer, they would stand in the courtyard, doorways and nearby places. The size of the mosques was in proportion to the town's religious community.

Before entering the prayer hall, the Moslem performed his ritual washings in the adjoining ablution chamber or, where none existed, in the courtyard font. On entering the oratory, he would take off his shoes. Inside, the faithful would stand in parallel rows, as in military formation, with their eyes directed towards the quibla wall and the mihrab, or in theory towards Mecca.

The main priest (*iman*), the head of the religious community, was dressed in a

white tunic and wore a turban wound around his head, like his assistants, whose number corresponded to the importance of the oratory. He would direct the prayers turning his back to the faithful. These

would repeat his gestures and canticles; they would bow their heads and pray, and they would prostrate themselves on the ground, kiss it and stand up again, repeating the genuflexion three times.

## I

### THE MAIN MOSQUE OF CORDOVA

The main mosque of Cordova—la Mezquita—was successively enlarged in the course of two centuries in accordance with the growth of the Moslem population, whose history it represented. Whereas the enlargement of a Christian church is a very difficult, not to say impossible matter, the enlargement of a mosque, formed by a wall lying towards Mecca and several juxtaposed naves, is easily achieved by the addition of others.

#### THE DOOR OF PARDON.

From the outside, the mosque has the appearance of a vast building covering considerable ground, but of no great height, and made of limestone masonry. Its strong buttresses, with the exception of those of the southern wall which were joined by arches in the 16th century, reinforce the walls, but do not counter any stress whatever. They are crowned by decorative merlons at regular intervals. Between the buttresses of the eastern and western fronts, there are large porches, most of which have been reconstructed in modern times. Those leading into the courtyard in the northern part of the edifice are almost all of a later date than the conquest of the city by Ferdinand III.

The mosque is generally entered by the door of Pardon, opening in the north wall at the foot of the tower. Of Mudejar style, it was built in 1377 during the reign of Enrique II, according to an inscription in Gothic characters, running around the archivault and the frieze of the arch, and it follows the trend of other doors of the Islamic period of the building. Crowning the pointed-horse-shoe entrance arch which, like the squinch bearing the coats of arms

of Castile and Leon, is covered with delicate plaster ornaments, there are three small blind lobulate arches, and another equally decorative one rises on either side of the buttresses flanking the entrance. The leaves of the door are covered with bronze plates inspired by the magnificent ornamental coat of the door of the same name in Seville cathedral; pious objects and inscriptions, both Gothic and Islamic, alternate. The knockers, also made of bronze, are masterpieces of great artistic worth.

Beyond the door, a vestibule is crossed, and a flight of nine stairs leads down to the Orange Courtyard.

#### THE ORIGINAL MOSQUE OF ABD AL-RAHMAN I.

On entering the charming courtyard, we see before us, in the background and partly hidden by orange-trees, the nineteen entrance arches of the hall of prayer. When the building served as a mosque, all of them were open, but now the majority are closed. The eleven on the right efface an equal number belonging to the original oratory, and form part of the reinforcement work of this façade carried out by Abd al-Rahman III owing to its ruinous state; this work was completed in the first months of 958, as we are told by a marble tablet let into the wall to the right of the door<sup>4</sup>. The central arch of the eleven, called the Palm Arch, forming an axis with the door of Pardon which now serves as an entrance, was reformed in the Renaissance style in 1531.

The original mosque occupies the north-western angle of the present building. According to the chroniclers, shortly after

the conquest of Cordova by the Mohammedans, the latter expropriated one half of a main church existing on the spot, to serve them as a place of worship, whereas the rest continued as a Christian church. Later on, with the growth of the Islamic community, they bought the remaining part from the Mozarabs, and finally Abd al-Rahman I tore down the entire Visigoth temple to erect the Moslem oratory.

According to a legendary tale, something similar occurred in the case of the Basilica of St. John the Baptist of Damascus, converted into a mosque by the Omeiyads. Excavations carried out a few years ago in the subsoil of the Cordova mosque, where the foundations of the divided church should have been found, only produced, underneath the present pavement, remains of a modest and small-sized construction which might have been a church, and at still greater depth, ruins of Roman buildings. One of the chroniclers states that during the beginning of the Moslem occupation, one of the towers of the nearby Alcazar served as a minaret<sup>5</sup>. Another chronicler affirms that Abd al-Rahman I constructed the mosque within a year's time, a most improbable date which has not to be taken literally, nor given full credit; more creditable are the reports that say the emir died before seeing the work finished, and that this was completed by his son Hisham I (788-796). To him are due a no longer existing minaret; a magnificent font set up in the courtyard, considerably smaller than the present one; and an outhouse for ablutions, leaning against the eastern outer wall, the foundations of which were discovered in the course of excavations carried out some years ago. These supplementary works are a good argument in favour of the opinion that the oratory, though inaugurated at the time of Abd al-Rahman I's death, had not yet been completed.

All western visitors who enter the mosque for the first time, are profoundly impressed by its interior owing to its strange and unexpected order of architecture. The comparison with a grove of columns is topical but just, especially so in places where the nave of the Christian church, installed in its interior, is hardly to be seen. The double arches with their multi-coloured voussoirs sustained by countless marble columns, seem to lose themselves in distant darkness, and they produce a sensation of mystery and immensity, as

well as of strength and suppleness. Prior to the construction of the cathedral, when bright beams of light entered through the nine great arches opening onto the courtyard and filled the oratory, and in the background dozens of oil-lamps glowed, the aspect was still more immense and mysterious.

The mosque of Abd al-Rahman I was a rectangular hall divided lengthwise into eleven naves running from north to south and perpendicular to the front wall or quibla, thirty-six metres deep. Its architects repeated the orientation of the Syrian mosques in which the mihrab faces south. As in the Syrian mosques, the central nave is wider than the rest, and the two end naves are narrower than the eight intermediate ones. The hundred and forty-two marble columns separating them proceed from Roman and Visigoth buildings, the ruins of which must have been plentiful on Cordovan soil.

The problem facing the architect of the mosque and solved with unsurpassed mastery—it is amazing to find in Cordova such perfect structure in the second half of the 8th century—was the raising of the compact separating walls of the naves of the oratory on slender columns in order to have as much available space as possible and the clearest visibility in the interior.

He achieved this object by increasing progressively the strength of the supports. Quadrangular cymatia rest on the capitals of the columns. They serve as bases for rectangular stone pilasters, linked transversally by brackets and longitudinally by two kinds of arches, the lower ones of horse-shoe shape starting from the cymatia and not supporting anything, and the higher ones rounded, the space between the two remaining open. The flight of the modillions and an impost placed on the pillars at the height of the keystones of the horse-shoe arches, from which the semi-circular ones started, made it possible to give them and the pilasters a width of 1.07 metres. The high arches and pillars support the solid walls on which the ceiling and protecting roofing rested, and in whose upper part there was a lead-lined conduit to absorb the rainwater expelled by gargoyles.

The mosque was thus of ample height inside—8.60 metres to the ceiling—; the pillars were well braced with the double arches necessary to form a solid footing, slender in the lower part and comparatively

broad on top, and the walls resting on the upper arches of sufficient thickness to sustain ceilings and roofings and the weight of the rainwater accumulated on them.

In the other mosques of Basilica shape, the pressure of the arches linking the supports is checked and countered by the insertion of wooden truss-rods in the springers, which always gives the interior the look of a provisional structure. The architect of the Cordova mosque decided to substitute horse-shoe arches for those rods, raising those serving as wall props to considerable height and thus obtaining an unquestionable advantage in beauty, elegance and monumental effect. We shall explain how this clever arrangement was arrived at. It is all the more amazing when we remember that all the columns were parts of former buildings, and their use would generally reveal both lack of means and artistic impotence.

The columns of this original mosque have distinct bases, extracted as they were from old buildings in a bad state of preservation. The arches are formed by voussoirs alternating with groups of three bricks each. The mihrab disappeared when al-Rahman II enlarged the oratory; the still existing parts of the wall, like all those of the oratory during its later enlargements, have the same characteristics in so far as frontal and lateral ashlar alternate. The modillions or brackets which, placed on top of the cymatia, permitted a reduction of the section of the pillars, show three or four cylindrical mouldings or bowtels, horizontal and tangent, excepting those of the terminal naves where there is only one bowtel or quartercircle. The remaining colour still seen on the sides of these modillions, some of which show tree leaves in bas-relief, and on other parts, prove that pilasters, arches—simulating the same mixed bonding—and walls were painted. The shape of the covering roof is not known, but it was most probably horizontal, and discussions are still going on as to whether it was crowned by a terrace, as is the case in Eastern and a number of North-African mosques, instead of the double-slanting framework covering its naves; in the 12th century, a historian tells us that the roofs were tiled.

It might be interesting to inquire into the origin of the forms and solutions we have described and to find an adequate answer. The stone construction of alternating frontal and lateral ashlar abounds

in Roman buildings, both in the East and in the West, in succession to Hellenistic architecture. The use of stone and brick in turn in the extrados and intrados of the arches was very frequent in buildings of the closing epoch of the Roman Empire and was continued by the Byzantines. In the Andalusian mosque a method might have been employed following the example of the Damascus mosque and other Syrian temples where archstones of lime, marble and basalt alternate.

The system of double superimposed arches which endows the Cordova mosque with an original beauty and unmistakable personality in medieval architecture, took its inspiration from analogous engineering works which had to face similar problems. When, during the construction of aqueducts, the unequal level of the ground made the erection of high pillars necessary these were braced with arches placed at different heights, reinforcing the props of the conduit and preventing them from moving and deteriorating. A very well known example is the Milagros aqueduct at Mérida.

As far as the horse-shoe arch is concerned, it was generally employed in Spanish Visigoth art; it is also found in a lesser degree and sparingly used, in the oldest Eastern mosques; in these two distant regions, it is derived from Roman architecture.

The lobulate modillions of the pilasters, a shape later extended to those of cornices and gargoyles, proceed from a degeneration of the acanthus leaf used in the Roman cornices of Corinthian and composite order and were inherited from the preceding Visigoth art of the Peninsula<sup>6</sup>.

To sum up, the forms of the first Cordova mosque in the part still preserved are more or less directly derived from others of Imperial Roman architecture, which spread with characteristic uniformity over all the Mediterranean shores during the first centuries of our era. Although some of these forms may have come to the Peninsula from the East, it is more likely that they followed the trend of former Hispanic ones.

What, of course, proceeds from the Mohammedan East is the plan and general disposition of the building, brought over with their Islamic religion by the conquerors, with the aisles of columns running perpendicularly to the quibla wall, and the central wider row, as in the al-Aqsa mosque



of Jerusalem, presumably built by caliph Al-Walid: the only Syrian mosque showing the same arrangement. The outer structure of the Cordova building will have proceeded from the same sources with its heavy buttresses at regular intervals, and its top ornaments of rows of decorative merlons, as seen on Eastern palaces and mosques and, amongst them, on that of Medina.

#### THE ENLARGEMENT CARRIED OUT BY ABD AL-RAHMAN II.

During the peaceful years of Abd al-Rahman II's rule (822-852), Cordova enjoyed an epoch of cultural, political and literary renaissance of singular splendour.

When relations between East and West became closer, the prestige of Abassid Bagdad imposed itself, and its accomplishments were enthusiastically received in the Andalusian Capital. The East sent to the Peninsula musicians, poets and merchants, as well as jewels, books, rich tapestries and textiles. Abd al-Rahman II organized the legal structure of the State and surrounded himself with a galaxy of men of law, philosophers and poets.

In 839 or 840, the first known Ambassador arrived from Byzantium at Cordova, a Greek sent by Emperor Theophilus with the mission of soliciting a pact of friendship.

Many newcomers came to the Andalusian Capital, increasing its population; and when the main mosque became insufficient for the number of faithful attending the Friday prayers, the sovereign decided to enlarge it.

Islamic chroniclers and historians are not agreed about the date of the works then carried out. They may have commenced in 833, during which year important improvements were accomplished. The first prayer in front of the new mihrab was held in 848, but work was continued till the emir's death. It is known to have been directed by the chief of eunuchs of his suite, Nasr, and another man named Masrur.

The work consisted principally in lengthening the eleven naves by 24 metres towards the south, demolishing the former mihrab and piercing the quibla wall to make both parts communicate. The addition repeats the structural work of the naves of the 8th century mosque, the only novelty being the suppression of the bases—those of the former oratory, then

interred, were recently discovered on lowering the pavement of that part—and the distribution, among the remaining columns used, of eleven finely carved capitals inspired by classical models. They show the advance of an art which formerly limited itself to the use of ruins for its supports. The modillions are a simplification of those of the former mosque and identical with those of the two outer naves, of one single bowtel or quarter-circle.

Fragments of recently discovered Moslem chronicles say that the mosque of Abd al-Rahman I only possessed nine naves, and not eleven, as had been affirmed, and that the second emir of that name added the two outer ones between August and December 848, one to the East and the other to the West.

But an examination of the building shows how little foundation there is for these affirmations which, furthermore, may allow of a different interpretation. Possibly those naves were, until then, intended for women and isolated from the rest. Abd al-Rahman II ordered their galleries to be changed; thus it is possible that, when these outer naves were joined to the other nine, they underwent reconstruction or important alterations, and this may be the explanation both of the references in the chronicles and of the similarity of their modillions to those of the 9th century enlargement<sup>7</sup>.

#### THE PORTICO OF ST. STEPHEN.

At the death of Abd al-Rahman II, the work was much advanced but not finished. It was completed by his son and successor Mohammed I (852-856). The final work carried out during this emir's reign consisted in reconstruction or restoration work, which was completed in 855, according to an inscription existing on the western door of St. Stephen and confirmed by written testimony. In view of the site of this inscription, it is assumed that the entrance in question was the last work tackled on the lateral façades.

The portico of St. Stephen, embedded in an older wall flanked by strong buttresses, gives rise to problems of difficult solution. It has an arched lintel under a bisected blind horse-shoe arch in which voussoirs of stone and groups of four bricks on edge alternate. A decorated archivault runs around the intrados of the arch which has

scotia imposts, and is carried above it to form the frieze. Lintel and tympanum are separated by a projecting horizontal band bearing the afore-mentioned inscription in Cufic characters along the intrados of the arch.

The voussours, archivault and frieze show bevelled floral ornaments carved in relief, protruding strongly from the shadows of the deep-set background. They follow a decorative technique usually called Byzantine, which spread, after the fall of the Roman Empire, across the East and the Mediterranean countries, where it subsisted up to the full development of Romanesque art.

On the side panels there are other decorations, in which a different material is used, a lime-stone strongly corroded by damp of totally distinct style. On each of these panels is to be seen, at the height of the easement arch of the door, the upper part of a decorative, blind gap, with a lintel ending on its sides in lobulate modillions and staggered top adornment. Modern reinforcements which the decay of the stones made necessary, have caused the disappearance of the lower parts.

The style of the other plaster decoration—vegetation-shaped—half blotted out on the side panels, is very different from the decoration of the central door dating from 855. The first would logically belong to the original mosque of Abd al-Rahman I; the poor state of the door rendering its reconstruction necessary in that year.

Crowning the frieze appears the trace of three small blind horse-shoe arches with remains of decoration on one of the panels between the door-jambs, and on top, underneath the impost on which the crowning merlons rest, there is a tiled penthouse or dust-guard ending in lobulate modillions with a central aletta.

On the axes of the blind side-gaps, a number of rectangular windows appear, closed by white marble jalousies, in classical—perhaps Roman or Visigoth—style, taken from some former building. In the surrounding masonry, floral ornaments in very low relief, contrasting with those on the lower panels, were carved but have almost disappeared. The decoration carved in the stones forms a horse-shoe arch over each window.

The plan of this Portico, with the blind gaps flanking the entrance, with its capping, decorative small arches, and these in turn crowned by the windows, served as a

pattern for the remaining Islamic entrances of the mosque and for the door of Pardon, constructed—as we mentioned before—in the 14th century.

#### THE ENLARGEMENT CARRIED OUT BY AL-HAKIM II.

Around the middle of the 10th century, and owing to the continued growth of the Capital of the Caliphate, the mosque once more became insufficient for the number of Moslems attending Friday prayers. This is shown by the installation of an awning in the courtyard by Abd al-Rahman III in order to protect from the sun those faithful who found no room within the naves.

Shortly after his accession to the throne, al-Hakim II began a second and ambitious enlargement, carried out with great pomp and art, most probably by some of the artists who, some time before, had decorated the hall of the palace of Abd al-Rahman III at Madinat al-Zahra. Plans for the enlargement were possibly made during the last years of this sovereign's reign. The work began in 962; inscriptions existing on the entrance arch of the mihrab, in its interior, and on the nearest arch to the right, refer to the completion of the work at the end of 965, but it probably continued another ten years.

The eleven naves of the former mosque were again extended southward by thirty-six metres, with an equal width, and they were completed on their front side, along the quibla wall and on both sides of the mihrab, by ten small rooms corresponding to the lateral naves. The enlargement thus covered a greater surface than Abd al-Rahman II's addition, almost equalling that of the primitive oratory, and the length of the building was considerably greater than its depth and exceeded the size of the courtyard in front.

In the arch-work separating the naves, the anterior structure was repeated and the general uniformity maintained. This time, the columns were specially made for the construction, dark and mottled fusts alternating. The first support capitals were of Corinthian, and the second of composite order, with leaves, volutes and echinus almost plain, as if awaiting final carving. The generally quadrangular cymatium of the former columns was replaced by the cruciform, with salients for the springers

of the arches and the end of the pillars. The modillions underneath the latter are analogous to those of preceding stages, but with plaster alettas protruding from their axes, as those of the penthouse of the door of St. Stephen. The central nave was enriched with octagonal pilasters, facing the pillars, decorated with geometric designs of Byzantine filiation, with Corinthian capitals alternating with those of composite order, over modillions, like the rest, but in pairs.

The great innovation of this enlargement, which was in fact a new mosque contiguous to the former one was, apart from other novelties of a decorative order to which we shall refer later on, the construction of four lantern domes covered by cupolas, marking the principal parts of the oratory and increasing its lighting.

The enlargement done by al-Hakim II was enriched with oriental contributions: mosaics, pointed and lobulate arches, these latter of Mesopotamian origin, with Hispanic traditions.

Forms of prodigious wealth combined with a splendid polychrome decoration to adorn walls and vaults in the shape of brilliant mosaics; floral plaster-work on a background painted in red; inscriptions partly in blue; and mottled marble on columns and socles. The mosque of al-Hakim II reveals an art in full possession of all its resources reaching its apogee as the expression of the high level of co-etaneous Cordova.

#### THE INTERSECTED ARCHES.

The construction of cupolas and lanterns raised difficult problems; heavy pillars could not be erected to support them, as these would have clashed with the columns and impeded the view from many points of the interior, of the mihrab arch and the priest in front of it conducting the Friday prayers.

These problems were solved in an ingenious and perfect manner by grouping in some cases two columns, and in others four, in the angles of the spaces covered by the lantern-domes. Two columns also set diagonally in the main nave at equal distances, and one in the lateral naves completed the bases of support. From all these columns spring arches with five lobules, instead of the horse-shoe ones in the rest of the mosque on which others of this latter shape are raised corresponding

to the high semi-cylindrical ones. In order to give a firm foundation and stability to the heavy lanterns resting on such frail supports and arches, other intermediate arches or branches of the same were interposed, riding on the lobulate ones; amongst all of them a real net-work of intersected arches was formed, with open spaces to give lightness to the whole. Their rich outline and the sumptuous decoration of alternating carved plaster and plain archstones, all of them multi-coloured, set off the spaces covered by the lanterns, the most important parts of the mosque.

The ingenious architect who conceived the most original structure of the arch-work in the second half of the 8th century, had a worthy successor in the man who, two hundred years later, further developed the idea by giving the arches a more complicated form and crossing them, combining his artistic sense with the wise technique of the builder. The intersected arches ever after constituted one of the favourite and characteristic motifs of Hispano-Moorish art, and following a process common to everything Islamic, they soon became a purely decorative motif which was repeated to excess.

#### DOMES AND CUPOLAS.

The desire to increase the monumental look and enrich the architecture of the mosque, more than the wish to give access of natural light to its principal parts, was responsible for the construction of the four lantern-domes, not of great height compared with the framework of the naves, with small-sized windows closed by shutters. One of them is raised over the two parts of the central nave nearest to the entrance arch of the mihrab; it is flanked by two equal ones over the adjoining naves; at the feet of the largest one, where the enlargement due to Abd al-Rahman II came to an end, a fourth dome covers a stretch of nine metres, converted in Christian times into a chapel called "the Villaviciosa chapel."

The four cupolas, of three different types, are stone vaults formed by a series of semi-cylindrical arches crossing one another, with small independent vault-stones between them, decorated with crypts or other small vaults.

Lanterns and cupolas break the monotony of the interior on both sides. They

may have been inspired by the Cairuan and other Tunisian mosques, where a pair of them generally adorned the extreme ends of the central naves ever since the 9th century. But the African ones are casque-shaped and of Byzantine progeny, whereas in the structure of those of Cordova the system of intersected arches was applied which we had formerly seen employed on plain vertical surfaces to cover three-dimensional spaces.

Vaults of a similar construction are to be found in the Near East, but no example is known dating from the Andalusian or older epochs, from which they differ considerably. Those most similar to the Spanish ones appeared, made of brick, in Mesopotamia and Persia, and, of stone, in Armenia, during the 11th and 12th century. As the application of the Cordova cupolas concurs with the principle of intersected arches, employed in the mezquita, as in no other former or contemporary mosque, and as the oriental types, in all likelihood, are not to be attributed to Cordovan influence, their origin is unknown. What may be affirmed, however, is the fact that they were abundantly copied all over France, England, Italy and Latin America, and they have even served as a pattern for many modern cupolas to the present day. It should not be forgotten that they preceded, by more than a century, those of ogival and Gothic style; and allegations of shortcomings in their mechanical usefulness and pressure resistance are notoriously wrong.

The three cupolas adjoining the quibla wall are of octagonal form due to a network of out-jutting lobulate arches in the case of the central one. They are crowned by octagonal lanterns with opening for light on their eight sides. The arches, of rectangular shape, rest on small columns situated in the angles. The eight arches forming the cupola which covers the space in front of the mihrab show two counterposed squares; the ample central octagon was covered by echinus vaults separated by curved dihedral double angles.

In the side cupolas which are all equal, four pairs of arches link the opposite vertexes of the octagonal ground-plan crossing each other; the central octagon being covered by a small dome of eight echinuses, and on the immediate vault-stones, there are adornments of concave stars and fleurons.

The cupola of the Villaviciosa chapel is raised over a rectangular base; the windows of its lantern open at the height of the arch springers. Four of them link the centres of the sides and form a square; two pairs running perpendicular to the sides join at their centre. The centre quadrangle is converted into an octagon by small decorated triangular spaces which form the base of a small hollow vault of twelve echinuses. In the square-shaped corners of the rectangle of the ground-plan, there are pretty small vaults formed by interlacing arches, and in the remaining spaces other mouldings and hollow stars.

#### THE FRONT OF THE MIHRAB AND THE SIDE DOORS.

It was in the mihrab, in the space before it and on its two sides, as also in the one at the end of the central nave, now the Villaviciosa chapel, that the artists of al-Hakim II amassed the most sumptuous forms and materials: spandrels, squinches and the dome lantern with extraordinarily rich and varied floral plaster ornaments, all painted in red and blue; on the few uncarved secondary parts, floral subjects were designed in the same colours. This multi-coloured aspect which has now disappeared, together with the gold and blue of the mosaics, must have sparkled gently under the light of the numberless little lamps forming the great metallic chandeliers suspended from the centre of the cupolas.

The entrance to the mihrab is formed by a horse-shoe arch resting on a pair of columns on each side, with beautiful marble capitals of classical carving transferred here from the former mihrab of the mosque of Abd al-Rahman II. The large voussoir surfaces are bordered by a marble archi-vault, decorated with carved floral designs, like the triple frieze and the squinch.

On the front part of the golas, an inscription carved on marble in Cufic characters mentions that the work was concluded at the end of 965.

Multi-coloured mosaics cover the voussoirs and the plain surfaces between them and the square compartments. The arch socles show on both sides magnificent white marble slabs with delicate floral carvings. Stems and leaves divided into multiple folioles in bas-relief bend so as wholly to fill the decorative field.

Above the frieze of the arch there is a wide band with seven small blind three-lobule arches, the background being covered with mosaics, all crowned by the vaults and the lantern of the cupola. This frontal part of the entrance arch to the mihrab served as a prototype for those of many other Western mosques; its influence even extended to that of Cairuan.

The space in front of the mihrab became in 1368 St. Peter's chapel, commonly called the Koran or Cancarron chapel. In 1767, it was in a ruinous state, and the Chapter ordered its repair, which began in 1771 under the supervision of the Frenchman Balthasar Devreton. The entrance arch and the two adjoining ones were covered by reredoses.

These side arches, also showing mosaics, belong to two doors which an Islamic compilation of the 14th century describes as secondary mihrabs. They constitute an innovation and passed on from Cordova to quite a number of Western mosques.

Through the door at the right, the caliph made his entrance every Friday, after crossing five small semi-cylindrically vaulted rooms corresponding to an equal number of naves, which were reached through a covered passage constructed above the street to link the Alcazar with the oratory. It substituted a former one erected further north by the emir Abd Allah and was demolished in the beginning of the 15th century by the Bishop Mardones when the episcopal palace was being reformed. Through that door, situated to the right of the entrance arch of the mihrab, the caliph penetrated into the "maqsura", formed by part of the mosque floor and isolated from the rest by a sumptuous wooden balustrade which disappeared centuries ago.

In the immediate neighbourhood, there was a tall, narrow door through which the "almimbar" or pulpit existing in all the major mosques was introduced. The Cordova pulpit, a delicate piece of marquetry work with incrustations of ivory, ebony, box-wood, red and yellow sandal and aloe wood, took seven years to construct—others say five—; it had seven steps and moved on four wheels. This precious, richly carved piece of furniture, the predecessor of the almimbar of the Kutubiyya at Marrakesh, also the work of Cordovan artists a little more than a century and a half later, still existed in the 16th century when it was seen and described by Ambrosio de Morales.

The door situated to the left of the mihrab arch leads to various compartments where the most valuable ritual objects were kept: gold and silver vessels, chandeliers used for the annual illumination during the night of the twenty-seventh day of Ramadan; and a heavy copy of the Koran containing four pages from the one written by the caliph Utman and stained with drops of his blood. This venerable relic was removed in the morning hours of every Friday and placed on a pulpit for the imam to read half a section from it; afterwards it was returned to its place.

#### THE MOSAICS.

The caliph al-Walid had asked the emperor of Constantinople to send artists to undertake the decoration with mosaics of the Damascus, Jerusalem and Medina mosques. Al-Hakim II followed the same example and sent an embassy to Nicephorus Phocas requesting the despatch of a specialist in this rich oriental technique. This man arrived at Cordova with 320 hundred-weight of small cubes for their manufacture as a present from the Byzantine emperor. Once more, we find a proof of the influence exercised by the Eastern caliphs on the masters of Cordova, to which is added, in this instance, the wish of al-Hakim II to accomplish a work of the greatest sumptuousness and splendour.

A coat of mosaics was applied to the voussoirs of the entrance arch of the mihrab, the plain surfaces within the friezes, the background of the crowning blind arches and the cupola covering the space in front. They are made of small cubes of vitreous paste in shades of purple, yellow, light green, white and black in addition to gold. The decorative motifs are floral designs and inscriptions slightly raised on gold and blue backgrounds; on one of the latter appears the Greek name, somewhat deformed, of the polychrome cube (phusaiphisa). These, as well as the manner of their combination, are purely Byzantine; the Cufic letters of the inscriptions being the only Islamic thing about them. Until recently, no notice was taken of a convex moulding from which the echinus dome which covers the central part of the stretch in front of the mihrab starts. It is of vitreous clay with polychrome imbrication work, and shows the use of glazed ceramic in architecture at

an unexpected epoch; it also suggests new ideas for the study of caliphal domestic pottery.

The chroniclers say, and the examination of the mosaics covering the arch of the door to the right of the mihrab confirms this, that the Byzantine artist found disciples in Spain; its floral decorations differ completely from those of the central arch and belong to the cycle of Cordova craftsmanship.

The mosaics of the door to the left are the modern work of Valencian craftsmen who did these to replace the old mosaics which have disappeared. Those of the mihrab arch and of the arch to the right were restored in 1815 and 1816. The springers and all the intradoses of the former were then made, as well as the lower parts of the other one, the covering band, and parts of the inscription. In both, the restored part is easily distinguished. In some cases it was done by painting and glueing small fragments of glass on the surface, and in others by applying the colour directly to it.

#### THE MIHRAB.

There is no mihrab of similar beauty and splendour to be found in any other mosque. This small recess, which has no other use than to show the direction in which the faithful have to turn when praying, in the Cordova mosque is of regular octagonal shape. It is covered by a vault formed by a plaster shell of elegant forms and delicate working. In the lower part, in order to permit the entrance to the small inclosure, two sides of the octagon are replaced by three others, the central one of larger size to correspond to the entrance archway.

The groundplan is anomalous, as those of still existing mihrabs of older mosques, both in the East and in the West, are of a plainer square or semi-circular form; one has to go back to the Almoravide epoch to find any with bevelled lower angles.

The socle is of smooth grained marble. It ends in a fillet of the same material bearing an inscription in Cufic characters and saying that al-Hakim ordered the mihrab to be faced with marble and that this work was completed in 965.

There is a wide impost of this material overhead, ending in modillions inspired by the classical acanthus leaf of cornices of the

Corinthian and composite orders. Each panel above the cornices is decorated with a blind three-lobule arch springing from small columns, with alternating plain and carved voussoirs; its jambs and squinches are covered with floral plaster ornaments.

The impost of modillions covered with floral ornamentation, the bead mouldings and other decorative forms of classical origin are to be found in contemporary churches of Constantinople. The artisans who came to Cordova from Byzantium, were therefore not only mosaic experts. When the remains of Roman Cordova lay forgotten and hidden under several yards of sand and rubble, exotic forms again reached Andalusia from the Mediterranean to keep alive the embers of classicism.

#### THE CEILING.

The mosque carried a horizontal ceiling of beams and boards up to the 18th century when, owing to its partly ruinous state, this was replaced, between 1713 and 1723, by a general vaulting made of reeds and plaster according to the fashion of the time. Part of this still remains.

Many of the parts of the old ceiling were employed in the framework of the naves. With some of the old and other new pieces, the architect don Ricardo Velázquez tried out the reconstruction in the entire central nave and some of the most westerly one of al-Hakim II's enlargement. The problem of the reconstruction was not solved satisfactorily at the time; it has been solved in theory, but not in practice, by the present architect of the mosque, don Félix Hernández Jiménez.

The horizontal ceiling, which was undoubtedly laid at the time of the enlargement by al-Hakim II—the way the primitive mosque and its first alteration in the 9th century were covered remains unknown,—was formed by girders resting on the top of the walls and by beams laid on them transversally, all of which supported panels of several juxtaposed boards, assembled by means of "halved" joints and with their top parts held together by cross-beams. According to Islamic authors, the ceiling had a wooden frieze with Koran verses inscribed on it.

All the pieces were richly carved and painted. The carving was of floral design on the beams, and geometrical on the boards, with out-jutting bands and simple

bows or straight and curved lines carved on them. The colours used were a deep red for the background, with black strokes and stems and leaves in relief partly on gold and partly on green. All the outlines of the beams are dotted with golden discs standing out against black<sup>8</sup>.

The wood used is pine of excellent quality, brought from Tortosa, or so an Islamic geographer of the 12th century says.

The decoration of beams and boards, especially the geometrical designs, reveal Abasside or Mesopotamian influence, possibly transmitted via the Fatimide art of Egypt.

#### THE PORTICOES OF THE ENLARGEMENT OF AL-HAKIM II.

When the mezquita was extended eastward, as we shall explain later on, the outer wall which closed the addition of al-Hakim I on this side, was broken up in order to make the two parts communicate, and three of the outer doors in this façade disappeared almost completely. There are some remains of arches in the still existing part of the wall, and another damaged entrance to the passage which was then situated at the back of the naves and is now inside the mosque.

This door, like the remaining one, is inspired by the St. Stephen portico. It has an arch-stone lintel and a horse-shoe arch easement. Stones with floral ornaments and groups of four bricks alternate in it, and there are five blind horse-shoe arches crowning it, but with this novelty that they interlace. Two of the backgrounds, the fillet of the frieze which frames the arch and the pediment, show geometrical designs—the first one swastikas—made of small pieces of reddish brick embedded in stone slabs. Such subjects were slabs, frequent subjects in Roman mosaic work. In the outer western wall, the two doors situated farthest south—one of them higher and the other one on the same level with the rest—through which one entered into the mosque from the passage leading to the Alcazar, end in straight lines and are unadorned. Of the remaining three, the centre one was considerably altered in the 15th century with Gothic additions, and the very much damaged side doors underwent a radical restoration in modern times, espe-

cially in the higher parts where the style of the afore-mentioned, best preserved door of the eastern wall was emulated.

#### THE ENLARGEMENT MADE BY ALMANZOR.

The last and largest enlargement of the Cordova mezquita was carried out a few years later (987-990), during the nominal reign of Hisham II, but the de facto government of the prime minister Almanzor, a strong personality who had defeated the Christians in the North in many campaigns.

The population of Cordova continued to increase in the last years of the 10th century; soldiers from Barbary who, some years later, at the beginning of the 11th century, contributed in no small degree to the dissolution of the Caliphate, arrived from Africa to swell the armies of the invincible minister. Notwithstanding the growth of Cordova's suburbs, a good many people were compelled to live in tents on the surrounding land.

The growing population and the desire to make a show of his religious feelings, according to the policy of attraction of the Alfaqis, drove Almanzor to undertake the new extension of the great fane.

According to a Moslem writer, Christian prisoners were employed.

The proximity of the Guadalquivir in the South, and perhaps to a greater extent the recent work of al-Hakim II—which it would have been criminal to alter—made it necessary to extend the mosque towards the east, on which side eight naves were opened all along the former building, and on the wall which till then had been the outer boundary, the buttresses were removed and large horse-shoe arches on double columns opened. The courtyard was enlarged in proportion. The mihrab and the broadest nave leading to it thus lost their central position, and the longitudinal symmetry of the mosque so far maintained was destroyed.

For the new arches those of al-Hakim II served as a pattern, but instead of stones and bricks alternating in them, they were all made of the latter material, the intermediate bricks being painted in red. The pointed horse-shoe arch, already present in the preceding enlargement, was more extensively employed in this new addition by Almanzor.

No new form of art is to be seen in the

interior, but on repeating once more the arcade structure over a considerable extension, the original effect of endlessness became still more pronounced.

This enlargement comprises seven entrances opened between the counter-forts on the eastern wall. Although they were modelled on the former arches of the same building, these were freely interpreted and not literally copied, although the resulting outlines and proportions were less attractive and showed a certain artistic decline. They survived with many deteriorations and the disappearance of their higher parts and, with the exception of the two southernmost entrances, they have been much restored.

The most important difference between these porticoes and the former ones judging by what was left of them, consisted in the location of two blind twin-arches separated by a small column on each side underneath the tapered windows, some of which preserve their old jalousies; some years before, other similar ones were opened in the outer walls of the minaret of Abd al-Rahman III which will be described later on. These gaps are filled with decorative arches of five or seven lobules which rest on small columns.

These porticoes show a profuse decoration of geometrical design, particularly on vousoirs and pediments formed by pieces of brick embedded in stone slabs, distantly inspired by Roman mosaics, as we have said before. But the floral ornaments carved in bas-relief on plaster predominate. These motifs originate in the acanthus leaf with much curved stems and leaves covering the surface. More uniform and monotonous than the preceding floral ornaments of the same building, they lack the plastic sense and the great wealth of forms and sculpture of the latter.

According to Islamic writers, the wooden doors were covered with copper plates and had heavy knockers of artistic design. In the rooms affording passage between the former corridor leading to the Alcazar from the Mezquita, there remain some wooden window-leaves lined with brass plates fastened by nails.

#### PAVEMENT AND LIGHTING.

As pavement to the mosque there served a layer of plaster tinted in red ochre on a base of lime and sand. The covering mats

made any more costly flooring unnecessary.

As far as artificial lighting is concerned, Moslem writers differ about the number of oil-lamps. One of them says that there were 280 large and small lamp-holders with 7.245 little lamps or butterfly tapers; another one reduces the number to 113, the larger ones holding 1000 little lamps, and the smaller ones holding only twelve.

Between the lamps there were inverted bells taken from the booty of war in Christian lands; the chroniclers of both religions tell us that, when Almanzor returned from his triumphal campaign which carried him in August 997 up to Santiago de Compostela, he had the smallest bells of the Apostle's Cathedral, among other trophies of war, brought to Cordova on the shoulders of prisoners.

Almanzor also ordered wax candles to be lit in the oratory. There is no doubt, that, on a larger or smaller scale, hundreds of lamps illuminated the mosque during the festivities. If the oratory impresses us profoundly to-day when only daylight enters, the effect must have been far more marvellous still when it was lit up.

#### THE COURTYARD.

The courtyard has undergone great changes since the enlargement by Almanzor, to whom it owes its present dimensions. It is one of the most attractive spots in present day Cordova, where the visitor may have a pleasant rest and take stock of his impressions. The dark green of the orange-trees, intermingled with a palm-tree and a severe cypress here and there, harmonizes admirably with the limestone work of the walls, to which it gives colour.

A prominent place in the court is occupied by the monumental Christian belfry erected in the 17th century around the Moslem minaret. The march of time has wrought the miracle of assimilating works so distant in their formal aspect and chronology, as are the mosque front facing the courtyard and the tower. Together with the vegetation and the baroque fountain, they form a perfect, faultless and harmonious whole.

The nineteen horse-shoe arches by which the courtyard communicated with the hall of prayers were open in the Islamic epoch. When the mosque was converted into a cathedral, almost all of them were closed and changed into the walls of small chapels,



with doors remaining in some of them in keeping to the demands of the new form of worship.

In more recent times it was intended to coordinate the restitution of the primitive aspect with religious requirements, and large plate mirrors were installed in some of the arches.

The galleries running along the other three sides of the court are formed by groups of triple arches between ashlar masonry and buttresses. They proceed from a reconstruction made at the beginning of the 16th century; perhaps the former general disposition which corresponds to the court galleries of the great mosque of Damascus was maintained. The columns are Arab with Corinthian and composite capitals of plain leaves.

The art of horticulture applied in the courtyards of the mosques which converts them into attractive closed gardens, seems to be an exclusive specialty of Spaniards; that of the Cordova mezquita is of old tradition; the planting of trees in the yard of the primitive oratory of Abd al-Rahman I is attributed to al-Shami, imam or leader of prayers.

Al-Hakim II was responsible for bringing water to the mosque from the Sierra; running-water was installed on the 25th of January 967; until then, the water for the basin in the courtyard had to be drawn from a well by means of a noria.

#### THE ISLAMIC MINARET AND THE CHRISTIAN BELFRY SURROUNDING IT.

A slender bell tower of pseudo-classical style rises next to the northern courtyard wall towards its interior, near the door of Pardon and dominates the whole building at a considerable height. Its six stories rise in graceful transition, owing to high pyramidal pinnacles till reaching the highest and smallest circular-shaped part, whose dome is crowned by a statue of the Archangel Raphael, attributed by some to the Cordovan sculptor Pedro de Paz, and by others to Gabriel de Oña.

The outlines of the monumental belfry still recall the severe, geometrical Herrerian forms, enriched by a multitude of balustrades, coats of arms and high obelisks, which give them wealth and movement and foreshadow the lavish Andalusian baroque.

The minaret, built by Abd al-Rahman III in 951 at the time of the Caliphate's greatest

splendour, was preceded by an older one raised by Hisham I in the beginning of the 8th century and pulled down by Abd al-Rahman. The 10th century minaret was used as the belfry of the Christian cathedral; at the end of the 16th century it was in a ruinous state due to its old age and the damage done to it by a thunderstorm accompanied by a furious hurricane in 1589. Four years later, the Chapter ordered its reconstruction according to a project presented by the master builder Hernán Ruiz (d. 1606), son of the architect of the same name who, some years before between 1560 and 1568, had added the higher part to the Giralda, the minaret of the main Almohade mosque of Seville. It was planned to give the Cordova tower a height of 130 feet, doubling the part to be preserved. In 1660, the building work reached the level of the clock, and four years later it was concluded under the direction of Juan Bautista Hidalgo with the installation of the crowning statue.

Abd al-Rahman III left little trace in the hall of prayers, but, on the other hand, he enhanced the beauty of the mezquita by building the largest and finest minaret of the West. In the course of two long centuries, it served as a model for some Christian belfries and for almost all the later Hispanic and Magribi minarets, among them the three monumental ones of the greatest Almohade mosques of Marrakesh, Rabat and Seville.

Hernán Ruiz retained hidden in the interior of the tower built by him the lower part of the minaret of Abd al-Rahman III, with its massive staircases. A few years ago, the architect don Félix Hernández removed some of the ashlar filling, rendering the minaret partially visible from the interior.

According to Moslem authors, the excavation work for the foundation of the Islamic tower went on for forty-three days until water was found; and in the building, thirteen months were employed. When the work was finished, the caliph arrived from his palace at Medina al-Zahra to visit it; he ascended by one of the staircases and descended by the other.

This minaret has a square plant of 8.48 metres a side; the outer walls are preserved up to a height of 22 metres, and the central walls some four metres more; Arabian authors give the height as being 54 cubits or 25.30 metres. It is built of

large ashlar incased in the inner wall to permit the introduction of horizontal wood rafters, according to an Eastern process of remote origin.

As we have said before, there were two twin-staircases, separated by a wall on a north-south axis, both of them winding around a rectangular buttress. The entrance to one of them was from the court, and to the other from the outside. They met above to reach the centre of the roof. Their stairs, of quadrangular shape and enclosed by pilasters, were probably covered by salient domes; the only one preserved, which is of horse-shoe section, seems to have been an exception. The stairs were separated by arches of the same form ending in the afore-mentioned pilasters. The small domes and arches were decorative as they sustained the stone steps in projecting form. Both of them were painted in red, showing simple geometric designs.

On top of this part, there rose, as was customary, another storey much smaller in size and of little height, containing the room of the two muezzins whose turn it was to stay inside during the night and to call from the terrace the ritual hours of prayer. This room had a door on each side and was crowned by a dome of lattice-work greatly praised by chroniclers. This high part measured 18 cubits in height or 8.52 metres, and the total height of the minaret was 72 cubits or 33.84 metres; the height of the inner part was thus four-fifths of the total. To judge from a relief on the door of St. Catherine (1557-1572), the walls of the part above the terrace ended in merlons.

The minaret had as its crowning piece three copper balls or knobs on a stem of the same metal, the two outer ones gilt and the centre one silvered. These were surrounded by two rows of graceful lily petals, and the finishing piece was a gilt pomegranate of more or less half a metre in height.

On the outside, in each of the northern and southern fronts of the lower part, four openings of twin-arches appeared, distributed at two different levels, and in the corresponding other fronts there were triple windows, all of them resting on small columns, with fusts of white and red jasper. A frieze of small blind arches resting on similar supports, decorated the upper part, and the terrace railing ended in merlons at regular intervals.

According to Idrisi, the entire exterior of the minaret was covered from top to bottom with beautiful painted and gilt ornaments and inscriptions. The voussoirs of some of the newly discovered windows show red paint.

#### THE ROYAL CHAPEL.

According to tradition, Ferdinand III, shortly after the conquest of the town, founded St. Clement's chapel, situated in the southern part of Almanzor's enlargement next to the quibla wall.

Around the year 1258, the principal chapel was that of Villaviciosa. Alfonso X, the Wise, contributed greatly to the work<sup>9</sup>; at the same time it seems that he erected between that year and 1260 the immediately adjoining Royal Chapel at the back and to the east, which was to serve him as a burial place. Its destiny was changed and it was converted into the vestry of the larger chapel; it served as a place of burial for Ferdinand IV, who died at Jaén in 1312, and in obedience to a clause in his will, the mortal remains of his son Alfonso XI, who died in 1350, during the siege of Gibraltar, were also interred there in 1371. This was a reason for his son Enrique II to order important work to be done in the chapel "to honour the body of his Royal father." This work was concluded in the same year of the interment, according to a still existing tablet. The royal remains were finally removed in 1736 to the Collegiate Church of St. Hippolyte, in the same city.

Mudejar Arabs of Cordova worked in the mosque consecrated to Catholic worship. In 1263, Alfonso X ordered all the Moorish servants in Cordova to work two days every year in the Great Church, i. e., the old mezquita, "so that greater care may be taken of it and nothing pertaining to it may suffer damage or destruction." This monarch granted exemption from all taxes to four Moors, two masons and two carpenters, who worked in the building, a privilege that was confirmed in 1280. It is therefore not surprising that we still find in the former mezquita, already converted into a Christian temple, traces of work belonging to the same artistic school as had presided over its building.

Compared with the ornamentation of the time of al-Hakim II which had certain amplitude and wealth of relief, the plaster

work which wholly covers the walls of the Royal Chapel, with all the profusion found in the rooms of the Alhambra, announce the last stage in its evolution. The filigree ornaments of almost smooth surface are endlessly repeated and cover the entire surface. To floral ornaments, very different from their original natural forms, geometrical motives are now added. The walls of the Royal Chapel rise above the framework of the naves of the mosque and repeat the lay-out of the nearby Villaviciosa chapel; they also have windows where the arches spring from the cupola. The design of these is identical to that of the arches in that chapel, but instead of being plain, their intrados was fragmented into small concave curves and lobules enrolled at their end in the Almohade fashion. Almocárabes, a form of plaster stalactites, completely fill the space between.

In the lower part of the chapel walls there is similar plaster work, still more minutely and delicately done, of a different character, resembling that of the door of Pardon. Like the inlaid ceramic work adorning the socles, it formed part of the alterations carried out by Enrique II in 1371, when transferring his father's mortal remains there.

At the end of the 15th century, Bishop Íñigo Manrique altered the cathedral installed in the mosque. In 1489, he dismantled the columns in five naves, from the great Villaviciosa chapel to the western outer wall throughout three intercolumniations, and he constructed two transversal walls in order to form a nave covered by a framework of two versants of curved panels, ending in the extrados of pointed arches of Gothic moulding.

#### THE CATHEDRAL OF THE 16TH CENTURY.

The Catholic Queen Isabella would not allow a part of the mezquita to be demolished in order that a cathedral might be built on its site, as the Dean and the Chapter wished. Perhaps the question was brought up in 1489, and the aforementioned work was carried out as a compromise solution.

In the following years, the ecclesiastical authorities did not give up their plan to erect in the centre of the mosque a great chapel with a sumptuous and monumental transept and choir nave, in accordance with the style of the time.

In April 1523, the work of demolition started in the Abd al-Rahman III's enlargement and in part of Almanzor's. The City Council opposed this alleging, among other reasons, that the mosque as originally built, was unique in the world, and that the fabric which it was planned to tear down was of such merit that it could not be replaced by any other of like beauty and perfection. They went so far as to threaten with the death penalty anyone who should carry out demolition or other work in the building until the monarch pronounced himself on the case. Without knowing the fane, Charles V gave judgment against the City Council, and after the demolition had been concluded, work on the new church was started on the 7th of September 1523<sup>10</sup>. Three years later, when the Emperor, recently married to Isabella of Portugal, passed through Cordova on his way to Granada and saw the beginning of the work, he repented his former decision and, according to Llaguno, exclaimed: "I did not know what this was, or I would not have allowed the old part to be touched; you do what it is possible to do, but you have undone what was unique in the world."

Hernán Ruiz, of Burgos, directed the work on the new building until his death in 1547, when he was succeeded by his son, of the same name, who had also been the master builder of Seville cathedral and who died in 1583. The vaulting of the main chapel dates from 1560; in 1599, the last stone was laid to close the final arch; the work was then directed by Juan de Oliva, and the decorating of the transept and choir continued up to 1607.

In the centre of the mezquita, the Christian church which breaks the continuity of the endless archwork and, unfortunately, cuts the incomparable perspective of the aisles and row of columns, arouses little interest. Even if it existed on an isolated and more discreet site, the same would have to be said because of its hybrid art, the work of mediocre designers.

Its plant is in the shape of a Latin cross, with a square main chapel, a high transept nave whose centre is covered by an oval dome attributed to Diego de Praves, and another longitudinal nave of the same width for the choir.

The work was started in a very advanced Gothic style, with pointed arches of fine and abundant mouldings and multiribbed stellate Gothic vaulting covering the

main chapel and the transept arms; the vaulting above the nave is semi-cylindrical and has sky-lights. An exuberance of small ornaments covers walls, arches and vaults, beginning in the lower parts with plateresque motifs of Gothic inspiration, and ending in the higher parts in pre-baroque style. Cupola and vaults, even in the transept which shows bad taste in its design, are filled with square compartments, medallions, consoles, grotesque figures and even statues. The eyes weary of the monotonous abundance of confused ornaments and turn back in admiration to the clearly outstanding forms of the Islamic building.

One should not protest too strongly, however, against the cathedral. If, in the Middle Ages, the Castilian monarchs insured the continued existence of the Islamic oratory, in modern times the sacrifice of only one part of it assured the existence of the rest. And the price paid does not seem excessive.

#### FURNITURE, JEWELS AND ORNAMENTS.

The main altar-piece is of exceptional beauty owing to the materials employed in it, multi-coloured marble and jasper. The work was begun by the Jesuit Father Alonso Matias in 1618 and concluded ten years later by Juan de Aranda Salazar. It is formed by two parts of composite order, with four columns in each of them. Originally it showed five canvasses by Cristóbal Vela, which were replaced by others painted by the Cordovan Antonio Palomino in 1713.

The tabernacle, also of rich marble, was finished in 1653 under the direction of master Sebastián Vidal. Work on the walnut pulpits, good examples of exuberant baroque style and attributed to the Frenchman Michel Verdiguer who may have designed them, was begun in 1766 and still continued eleven years later.

The Sevillian sculptor Pedro Duque Cornejo elaborated prolifically, from 1748 to 1757, the sumptuous walnut carvings of the choir with its wealth of ornaments, small statues and medallions; "an anthill offuscating the sight," in the words of Antonio Ponz.

Good iron railing work of the 16th century can be admired in the chapels of St. Paul, the Holy Name of Jesus, the Assumption and the Holy Ghost. The

bronze railings of choir, main chapel and transept belong to the 17th century.

There is an interesting display of paintings distributed among the chapels, generally decorating the outer walls. In the old St. Peter's chapel there is a polyptych showing the seated Virgin in which the influence of the 14th century Tuscan school which strongly shows its Italian origin is visible.

Without leaving the building, the visitor may form himself an idea of the Cordovan school to which exceptional importance is attributed to-day within the Andalusian art. An Annunciation by Pedro de Córdoba, signed and dated 1475, is found in the Incarnation chapel. A beautiful plateresque reredos in the St. Nicholas of Bari chapel dating from 1556 is the work of the romanized Flemish painter of the 16th century, Pedro de Campaña, a great artist known in his country as Peter de Kempeneer. Without proper foundation, he has also been considered the author of the coetaneous-pieces in the Chapels of the Assumption, the Virgin of the Rosary and the Holy Name of Jesus<sup>11</sup>.

Part of a reredos is also formed by a "Last Supper", by the Cordovan prebendary Pablo de Céspedes (d. 1608) who worked in Italy, and the Italian influence in this principal work of his is evident. He was also an excellent poet and enjoyed great fame in his time.

Another interesting representative of the Cordovan school is Antonio del Castillo, as good a narrator as a portrait-painter, a proof of which are the Saints Philippus and Jacobus flanking a Virgin on a wall-painting of the cathedral. "Our Lady of the Rosary," the central figure of a reredos in the chapel of the same name is a beautiful work of art.

The "Martyrdom of St. Stephen" in the chapel of this Saint is an example of the art of Céspedes' best disciple, Juan Luis Zambrano.

Several paintings by another Cordovan artist, Antonio A. Palomino y Velasco (d. 1726), better known for his biographies of our greatest artists of the 15th to 17th century than for his own work, exist in the Cardinal or St. Theresa chapel (sacristy and chapter-room), among them "The conquest of Cordova by St. Ferdinand," of baroque sumptuousness. Among the other paintings in the church, there should be mentioned a "St. Thomas," by Pedro de Orrente (d. 1635), in the corresponding

chapel; "The apparition of St. Leocadia to St. Alphonsus at Toledo," a canvas signed by Pantoja de la Cruz and dated 1603, and among other works of lesser interest by Vicente Carducho, a great picture representing St. Eulogius in the chapel of that Saint. Palomino considered this a master-piece.

The cathedral's art collection was enriched a few years ago by a reredos from the ruined Carmelite church, of Cordova, a prominent work by Valdés Leal painted around 1564 to 1568.

The figures of the Saints in the lower part, although of somewhat hard conception, remain undisturbed by the violent baroque dynamism of the rest.

The chapel of the Immaculate Conception contains three beautiful sculptures by Pedro de Mena, and the sacristy has others by the Granadine José de Mora, among them an original St. Theresa. The altar-piece in the St. Paul's chapel, by Pablo de Céspedes, shows a fine statue of the Saint sculptured by the said artist. In St. Bartholomew's chapel, there are several frontals of inlaid ceramics of the 14th and 15th century.

Supported by the quibla wall, near the mihrab and east of it, the afore-mentioned large chapel was built in the beginning of the 17th century by order of Cardinal Salazar. It now serves as a sacristy and chapter room. Francisco Hurtado, the author of the Sacarium of the Paular Charterhouse, was also responsible for the chapel's baroque decoration, which is completed by the large paintings by Palomino of which we have spoken before.

Among the cathedral treasures, pride of first place belongs to a splendid Gothic monstrance due to the gold- and silver-smith Enrique de Arfe, perhaps the finest of its kind in Spain. Its work was begun while the bishop Martín Fernández de Angulo held office (30th of September 1510 to 21st of June 1516), and it was carried for the first time in the Corpus Christi procession of the 3rd of June 1518. During the 18th century it suffered two unfortunate reforms in 1735 and 1784.

On a perfect twelve-cornered platform measuring a foot on each side, six pedestals form the base for the buttresses of the supporting arches and columns, over which the airy pinnacled tower elevates itself, ending in a stylised thistle. Among the subsequent reforms are the socle-reliefs, the crowning crest, the winged sphinxes

supporting the cylindric glass cover, the Assumption of the Virgin within the monstrance, the dolphins linking the pinnacles, the pedestal of the crowning figure of Christ giving His blessing, and probably the figure itself; just as in the monstrance of Sahagún, the repoussé garlands of the pedestal are of renaissance style; its beautiful faces show Gothic influence; the statues crowning the pinnacles of the buttresses, and among them the graceful St. George spearing the dragon, are of exceptional charm. The exquisite beauty of the ornaments in no way lessens the effect of the supple and elegant architectural lines; everything in this work of art is well reasoned and subordinated to the unity of conception. It leaves an unforgettable impression<sup>12</sup>. Partly gilded, gold and silver form a perfect harmony.

The treasures of the cathedral also comprise four great crosses. The oldest one, of processional character, wrought in gilded silver and of Gothic style, has been attributed to Enrique de Arfe. Another Gothic cross shows baroque ornaments added during a radical restoration. A cross made of quartz or rock crystal, chased in silver, dates from the 16th century. And finally, the fourth and largest cross, also processional, is of gilded silver.

First place among the magnificent collection of pyxes take two given to the cathedral by Don Diego Fernández de Córdoba, Duke of Segorbe, in 1581. Finely enameled, they bear the signature of Rodrigo de León, who is also responsible for another pyx of plateresque style showing the Virgin holding the dead Saviour in her arms.

The cathedral possesses important works of Cordovan silver-smiths whose fame has reached the present days. There is an abundance of silver shrines. One of them, showing the martyrs St. Acysclus and Victoria, bears the hall-mark of the Damas, Cordovan silversmiths, and dates from the first third of the 16th century; another one, also made of silver, shows the bust of a female saint in natural size. Silver filigree work adorn a medieval reliquary.

The Cordovan silversmith Damian de Castro is responsible, among other masterworks, for a chalice and a golden ciborium, dated 1776 and adorned with small seraph-heads, chased and repoussés. Excellent artistic chiselled work of plateresque style adorns the brazier-holder where the incense is burnt on Saturday before Easter, a gift of the Marquesa de los Trujillos.

Of silver are also two images of the Conception and the Purification, both enameled, and a St. Raphael, all one metre in height; a Santiago given in 1913; a holy-water pot in Spanish renaissance style with beautiful chiselled ornaments; chalices, ciboria, lecterns, pewters, etc.

The admirable collection of Cordovan silversmith-work in the cathedral is completed by the silver-plated wooden image of Our Lady of Villaviciosa, made in 1577 by Rodrigo de León; the pedestals of Our Lady of the Fuensanta, dated in 1657 and profusely decorated, and the sumptuous baroque urn for the Easter-week monument, dating from the middle of the 18th century. The Cordovan silversmith Martín Sánchez de la Cruz made the great transept lamp weighing about 375 lbs. in 1629<sup>13</sup>.

On festive days, sixteen large candle-sticks further enrich the main chapel. Two made of silver, weighing 175 lbs. and thirteen and a half feet high, exquisitely wrought in Rome by Faustino Taglieto, were given to the cathedral by the Bishop fray Domingo Pimentel upon his return from Italy. "No similar gift—says Gómez Bravo—is to be found in any other Spanish church." Another two candle-sticks, six feet high, were given by the Cardinal-Archbishop of Toledo, don Pascual de Aragón. The remaining twelve are of gilded bronze.

Among the ornaments, five altar-hangings should be mentioned, embroidered in the 15th century. A specially fine specimen among them represents St. George.

The cathedral possesses an interesting archive and library where, among others, are kept the 10th-century Mozarab manuscript of the *Indiculus luminosus*, by the Cordovan Álvaro, and a parchment codex of the 10th century with beautiful initials, as well as about 200 other codici and incunabula, some of the former dating from the 14th century, and bound in fine embossed leather of Mudejar style.

#### MINARETS OF OTHER MOSQUES, AND BATHS.

In every district or suburb of Cordova, there were other mosques, almost all of them modest buildings of limited size and poor construction. There were also a great number of small oratories. A Spa-

nish geographer of the 11th century counts 491 mosques as having existed in the 10th century, among which he includes no doubt small oratories as well.

All of them have disappeared, but three minarets are preserved and to-day form the belfries of the St. John's, Santiago's and St. Clara's churches. They are small square towers with plain or sparsely decorated walls. As their original ashlar fabric was hidden under partering, their existence was only recently discovered.

In order to adapt those minarets to their new destination, it was only necessary to demolish the higher part raised over the balcony and containing the room to which the muezzins retired. The walls of the lower part were then enlarged and an arch-supported opening created where to hang the bells. A vane and a cross on top substituted the bar with its string of metal globes formerly crowning the minarets. The St. John's belfry situated on the small square where the Barroso, Argote and Sevilla streets meet, north of the main mosque, is a square tower with a width of 3.70 metres on each side, and an inner marble staircase. Its outer facings are decorated with twin-arches, of broken horse-shoe form, all of them blind except the southern front one. On top of the preserved part, there remain rests of decorative archwork supported by small columns. It had a white plaster covering and was painted.

Geographers and historians speak of several hundred buildings intended for baths in caliphal Cordova. Counting public and private baths, there must have been a great many of them, and they were in constant use. It is known that steam baths were mostly taken, and the temperature in the halls was raised progressively from the entrance hall onwards.

Some remains of such a bath which possibly belonged to the caliphs still exist and are distributed among the houses at no. 53 and no. 55 in calle del Cardenal González and at no. 16, 18, 20 and 22 in calle de Cara. Of two others, well known of old and erected in the 11th or 12th century, there still exist the greatly changed centre halls with horse-shoe arches on columns, at no. 9, calle de Céspedes, and at no. 10, calle de Carlos Rubio.

## THE DEAD CITY OF MADINAT AL-ZAHRA AND ITS PALACES

To understand the greatness of the civilization of the Cordova Caliphate, in addition to visiting the main mosque, an excursion must be made to the ruins of Madinat al-Zahra: the city built by Abd al-Rahman III in 936 at the foot of the mountain ridge, eight kilometres from Cordova.

To-day it is not a mere field of ruins, a vast graveyard of former buildings of purely archaeological interest. The reconstruction of the great hall of that caliph; the unearthed ruins of other buildings; the decorative stone and marble fragments and the domestic pottery reconstructed with pieces found among the rubble, cannot fail to interest all cultured persons.

The following distich attributed to its founder by Arab authors justifies the erection of the royal city: "When monarchs want to perpetuate the memory of their reign, they use the language of beautiful buildings. A monumental building shows the majesty of him who ordered its erection."

### FOUNDATION AND PAST HISTORY OF MADINAT AL-ZAHRA.

Abd al-Rahman III must have felt himself hemmed in between the walls of his Cordova Alcazar notwithstanding its great extension. Following the example of Abasid monarchs, he wanted to set up a palatial city in keeping with his greatness.

Islamic writers speak of the—perhaps legendary—origin of the incomparable city.

One of the sovereign's concubines left to him at her death her large fortune, which he intended to employ in the ransom of Moslem prisoners held in the Christian Kingdoms of Northern Spain. But his envoys visited these without finding a single Islamic prisoner. In accordance with the wishes of his favourite wife al-Zahra, Abd al-Rahman III then employed the legacy in the construction of the city to which he gave her name. The fact is that the word "Madinat"—town—is of feminine gender. The statue of a woman—said to be the favourite—crowned the principal entrance; the Almohade caliph Yakub al-Mansur ordered the removal of the statue in 1190.

The work of building al-Zahra continued for many years and consumed enormous sums of money; from 941 in which its mosque was inaugurated, public prayers were held there every Friday; four years later, or nine years after the foundation, we find reports of a splendid reception in the new residence; in 947—and perhaps before—the caliph resided there with all his household, guards, servants and courtiers, and money was struck at the local mint. The work continued during the remaining years of Abd al-Rahman III's reign and the fifteen of his son and successor's, although perhaps at a slower rate during the first years of the latter, while the splendid enlargement of the mezquita in the Capital was carried on.

To a still greater extent than the Cordova mosque, Madinat al-Zahra, created as by enchantment in a short space of time,

would contribute to the prestige of the Cordovan caliph, thanks to its extraordinary monumental wealth without equal in Western Europe, in whose Capitals no edifice existed even distantly comparable to it.

Travellers from distant lands, princes, ambassadors, merchants, pilgrims, priests and poets affirmed that in all their travels they had seen nothing like this city, which was beyond all imagination.

The descriptions given of Madinat al-Zahra by geographers and historians have, as a result of recent studies and excavations, been found not to be as hyperbolic as was thought. According to these descriptions, 10,000 workmen were employed in the task with 1,500 beasts of burden; 6,000 stones were laid every day, apart from material employed in the foundations and bricks. 4,313 columns were put up, of which 1,013 came from Ifriqiya (Tunisia). The Emperor of Constantinople sent 140, and the rest arrived from different places in Spain. 3,750 slaves were employed in the caliphal household, and the harem contained 6,000 women.

The crown-prince Al-Hakim supervised the work. The architect and geometer who directed the building in the early stages was called Maslama ibn Abd Allah. Among the men in charge of the transportation of the African marbles figured a certain Ali ibn Jafar, born in Alexandria.

After the termination of Madinat al-Zahra, all the great court ceremonies were held in its palaces.

Descriptions have come to us praising the extraordinary splendour and pomp displayed in them, and calling them only comparable to those of the distant court of Byzantium, which they emulated.

Between strong guards of honour, richly uniformed, with shining weapons and in perfect formation, monarchs and ambassadors would ascend the stairs to the oriental hall of Madinat al-Zahra, which opened onto the terrace, and whose walls were covered with sumptuous tapestries. At the end, the caliph, seated on cushions and surrounded by all the dignitaries of his brilliant court, looked like some almost unapproachable deity. The visitors prostrated themselves before him, and, as a special favour, were permitted to kiss the sovereign's hand.

But the very wealth of this city, artificially created to satisfy the whim of a favourite or the will of a monarch, after an ephemeral life, led to its destruction.

It was a victim of the internal strife which brought the Cordovan Caliphate to an end. Coins were still struck at its mint in 1009 or 1010. During the first days of November of the latter year, after a three days' siege, Berber forces entered the town thanks to the complicity of an officer of the garrison and exterminated all the soldiers and defenceless civilians they found in it. They used the city as their headquarters till the following spring, when they ransacked the place and set it on fire before abandoning it. The plunder of its enormous ruins began immediately afterwards, the copper was removed from the doors, the lead piping and other materials were carried away<sup>14</sup>. After the Christian conquest of Cordova (1236), even the name of the aulic city was forgotten. Ferdinand III refers to it in some documents as "Old Cordova". Other manuscripts of 1405 speak of the castle of Old Cordova as being the property of the city.

For centuries, the ruins of Madinat al-Zahra were an inexhaustible quarry of building materials. Remains of destroyed aqueducts and water conduits disappeared day by day, until finally vegetation piously covered all trace of them. Water basins, pedestals, fusts and capitals were carried away to Seville, Granada and even Marrakesh, especially in the 12th century. The stone-work was used for building churches and houses in Cordova; and in the 15th century, it served for the foundation of the nearby Hieronymite monastery of Valparaíso; and later on for the enclosure walls of all the wild bull pasture grounds which cover the site of the former city.

In 1854, a year after Pedro de Madrazo had published a book in which the site of Madinat al-Zahra was identified, some excavations were carried out, but without any great results. Finally, in 1911, more successful work was started under the direction of don Ricardo Velázquez. This has been continued with long interruptions to the present day.

#### THE UNEARTHED RUINS.

An Islamic writer affirms that Cordova, al-Zahra and al-Zahira—this last being the residence erected by Almanzor east of the city—were so densely populated and had so many houses that one could walk across them without a break for ten miles under the light of the street lamps.



An excellent highway led from Cordova to Madinat al-Zahra. Several rivulets were crossed by solid horse-shoe arched bridges, two of which still exist, as well as the remains of four others.

Nowadays, the dead city lying north-east of Cordova is generally reached by a different route: five kilometres on the high-road to Palma del Río, and an ascent of three kilometres to the northern wall of Madinat al-Zahra, where are the pavillions, workshops and sheds, in which the remains and fragments found in the excavations are kept and restored.

From this spot situated on the mountain slope, a panorama of severe beauty extends far and wide. At the foot of the mountain, slightly undulated plains are cut through by the silver ribbon of the winding Guadalquivir, on whose banks the houses of Cordova are huddled together. Farther on, the low mounds of the corn-growing tracts, limited on the horizon by hills of no great height. The Cordovan poet Ibn Zaydun (1003-1070) left a brief and just impression of this landscape in verses which evoke former days of love spent in Madinat al-Zahra with his sweetheart Wallada:

*How clear is the horizon!  
How serene a countenance  
is shown us by the soil!*<sup>15</sup>

From the terrace where the pavillions are, the traces of the almost perfectly rectangular site of the former city may be observed, extending 1,518 metres from east to west and 745 metres from north to south, and comprising an area of 113 hectares. If we scan the panorama carefully, particularly in the early morning and late afternoon, we distinguish the straight lines of two small parallel elevations formed by the fallen double wall, with a passageway between and intermittent towers, once the protecting ring around a large part of the town. On the excavated northern side, there was a single wall.

According to the description of a geographer of the 12th century, al-Zahra was laid out within the walled inclosure in three terraces rising one above the other, a fact proved by the examination of the ground and the excavations. The esplanade of the highest terrace on which the excavated buildings also occupy different levels, was at the height of the roofs of the lowest, allowing an ample view over the Guadalquivir valley from all three terraces.

Each had its independent walled precinct.

Splendid palaces whose beauty it would be difficult to describe occupied the highest terrace; gardens and orchards the intermediate one. On the lowest were the main mosque and the living quarters.

Like sores opened in the shadowy green of the soil, we distinguish on the higher terrace the islets formed by the ruins of the excavated parts, a small area indeed if compared with the virgin land still awaiting the pickaxe (for the State owns only a not very large part of the site). On this same highest terrace, to the east of the excavations, several mounds reveal the existence in the past of pavillions divided into transversal aisles and preceded by large courtyards; their site concurs with that indicated by historians of the times of the Caliphate or a little later, for the most sumptuous rooms, the scenes of the most solemn ceremonies held amidst the most splendid architectural surroundings, and with a pomp only to be compared to that of the Byzantine court.

On the intermediate platform which supported the splendid gardens and shady groves, the marks of ruin of an important isolated building are to be found, and farther east, the mosque; and thanks to the continued and parallel lines of the small mounds of rubble, which arches and walls have formed in their fall on the ground, the existence of its five naves, affirmed by written testimony, has now been definitely established.

There were also in Madinat al-Zahra barracks, a mint for coining money, fountains, markets, arms factories, gold and silversmiths' shops, inns, two baths and many dwelling-houses. What has been excavated so far, and particularly the great hall of Abd al-Rahman III, kindle a wish to discover, with the help of pickaxe and shovel, the secrets still guarded underneath the heaps of rubble of the eastern rooms, some of which seem to have been roofed by cupolas.

Parks and flower gardens required abundant water, and it is known that Abd al-Rahman III succeeded in locating it on the northern slopes of the mountain ridge, at a distance of two and a half miles from Cordova. The conduit is not one of the least admirable works owed to this monarch's initiative; it was achieved by drilling a way through the mountains and by well constructed aqueducts crossing glens and valleys.

For many centuries the water ceased to flow through the canal, and to-day ivy and myrtle shrubs and the trees—cypresses, thuyas, almonds and palms—, planted to relieve the desolation of the ruined walls, languish for the want of water which has to be brought from distant places.

The terrace of the modern pavillions and store-rooms has for its boundary the northern city wall, of which a large part has been reconstructed, but with material greatly differing from that of the 10th century. The inner circle of Madinat al-Zahra is entered through a door in ruins, opening in that wall, to which the old highway led; to the right is the small guard-house with its adjoining latrine.

For the benefit of riders, two ramps start from the door, the one on the right leading to a group of small constructions surrounding various courtyards, undoubtedly intended as living quarters. The left-hand ramp leads to a large court at whose northern side there was a building formed by a portico and the vestibule of a pavillion divided into five transversal aisles. The end ones are joined to those intermediate by three column-supported arches, embedded in the jambs which had doors with locks. The three middle aisles, the central one of which is a little wider than the other two, form an ample room. They are separated by two walls in which three arches opened, the outer ones being of triple form, resting on two columns leaning on the wall and two detached ones.

The fact that in this room no other decorative remains have appeared than the bases and Corinthian and composite marble capitals of columns leads to the assumption that it served for administrative purposes. Its construction is attributed to Abd al-Rahman III.

The two buildings with courtyards, situated to the right of the door in the wall, are to-day without doors of access. Perhaps the floor which is still preserved was reached from a higher gallery by means of ramps or staircases. Between the two, the ramp descends through several doors to a floor seven metres lower, on which there are small living rooms; one of them with a stove and small kitchen yards; latrines are plentiful in the excavated parts, some large and some in pairs; they have a low bench or seat with a narrow rectangular slit and a sewer in front; in almost all of them, a small loose stone or marble basin was found. Underneath the latrines run

small sewers which also collect the water from the courtyard in central drains, and their perfect design and arrangement, like that of the masonry flumes and lead pipes of the fresh water system are another reason for admiring caliphal Cordova.

Farther west, two courtyards have been discovered; the northern one backs on to the outer wall; the other, 16 metres lower down, had surrounding galleries on rectangular pillars probably resting on wooden lintels.

Still further west, and adjoining these, the ruins of a sumptuous construction appear, only separated from the northern wall by a passageway in a high place. Several epigraphic fragments allow us to ascribe it to al-Hakim II's reign; the capitals found here are similar to those made in 947. On the south side, the rest of the construction is missing as the wall which separated it from other lower situated buildings fell down. Its most important part are two not very large rooms of a long rectangular shape, the smaller northern one of which has alcoves at one end, reached through arch-crowned columns, a form repeated in the 14th century in the Alhambra. In the jambs of the openings and in the walls which are slightly mortised to receive them, there remained fragments resting on red socles with bands carved on limestone slabs fixed with lime mortar, and showing floral designs. The panels in the bands remained unadorned.

The pavement of the two halls and the adjoining rooms shows a combination of flagstones and red baked clay; some of the former had pieces of brick inserted which made chessboard motives similar to those on several door tympana in the Cordova mosque.

In the excavated part, an extremely thick wall separated the higher terrace on which the afore-described ruins stood at various levels, from the adjoining terrace on the southside. Within its thickness is hidden a passage with two breaches; it is divided into sections by horse-shoe arches and covered by a semi-circular cupola. The passage received the light through tapered windows, opening with some splay in the southern wall, where there was also a door. On the eastside, the passage ends in two ruinous and not very large rooms, from which a gallery is reached whose northern wall contains three openings formerly filled with arches supported by columns embedded in the jambs; the arches

at the end also rested on one insulated column and the centre one on two. The opening wall was divided into three which gave passage into a hall of three longitudinal aisles united by a combination of six arches resting on five detached and two embedded columns. On either side, there is another symmetrical aisle, divided into various rooms. The doors of the largest of them led into the hall, and their arches rested on marble pilasters of admirable workmanship. This hall, about 70 metres to the south from the former one, and 10 metres lower, was excavated in 1944. It was a sensational discovery because of the wealth and mass of decoration partly preserved on the walls and partly found among the debris in larger quantities than anything found before and rendering its reconstruction possible. The architect don Felix Hernández is zealously engaged on this work.

The pavement is made of marble slabs. Over the socle of the same material a red band was painted on the whitewashed wall. The limestone ashlar of the walls were covered with slabs about 4 cm. thick and carved in very delicate floral designs. The decoration continued probably up to the higher part of the columns and pilasters separating aisles and entrance doors.

Some bases appeared in situ, and so did various mutilated pilasters; others as well as capitals and fragments of fusts were discovered among the debris together with arch stones and springers. The stones, partly smooth and painted in red and partly carved follow the same alternating system as in the Cordova mosque.

The hall was destroyed by fire. Its ceiling was made of pine wood like those of other excavated rooms.

Several epigraphs in Cufic characters on friezes, pilasters, bases and capitals, give the dates of 953 to 956-957, when the work on this hall must have been finished, and the name of Abd al-Rahman III together with those of various artists who took part in the decorating.

The splendid art of this hall reveals the same intense influences proceeding from the Eastern Mediterranean, as al-Hakim II's enlargement of the main mosque.

From the middle of the 10th century onward, there were artists in Cordova who brought forms of Hellenistic ascendancy learnt in the most famous Byzantine and Syrian workshops. It is interesting to note the fact that in Madinat al-Zahra and

in the al-Hakim II's enlargement of the Cordova oratory, as in the Syrian Omeiad palaces from Mchatta to Qasr al-Ha'ir, a mixture—baffling in its complications—of juxtaposed motifs treated with different techniques and of greatly varying origins was found, whose syncretism was not achieved in Cordova until the last years of the 10th century.

The arrangement of halls formed of various aisles separated by columns also exists in Syrian palaces such as Kirrbet al-Minyé. The disappearance of the Byzantine palaces, including those of Constantinople, renders it impossible to know whether this basilical structure employed in many other forms at Cordova in the 10th century was used before then in the great Eastern city.

Among the decorations carved on limestone at Madinat al-Zahra there are a small number done on plaster, one of them a base; in some cases repairs were carried out with this material.

#### FOUNTAIN BASINS, WATER JETS AND DOMESTIC TABLE-WARE.

Among the marvels of the palaces at Madinat al-Zahra, Islamic authors devote extraordinary praise to two fountains or fountain-basins installed in as many halls. The larger one was of gilt bronze beautifully worked with human figures in bas-relief. It was brought from Constantinople in 955 or a little later by Ahmed al-Yumani—the Greek—and the Mozarab Bishop Rabi ifn-Zaid, or Rekamund. The small basin, of priceless value, is made of green marble. According to some reports, it came from Syria and was brought by Ahmed to Cordova; others say that the priest Rekamund brought it from Constantinople. Abd al-Rahman III ordered it to be placed in the bedroom of the large eastern hall, called al-Mu'nis. On the basin he ordered the figures of twelve different animals to be placed, enriched with pearls and other jewels, made in the arsenals of caliphal Cordova. The water spouted from their mouths. A small bronze stag, highly stylized, which came from Madinat al-Zahra and also spouts water, gives the idea of the artistic value of others that are lost.

While only written descriptions of these basins remain, there appeared during the excavations and are carefully guarded in the

pavillions of recent construction, several fragments of a Roman sepulchre of a good period which must also have served as a basin.

On the same spot, a great mass of mural decoration fragments of stone, and some of marble, are to be seen, as well as marble bases and capitals found among the ruins.

Descriptions of the ceremonies held in the palaces of the ruined city refer to tapestries and rich cloths covering walls and floors. Although there is no possibility of making them reappear, nothing can give a better idea of the perfection and refinement of the aulic industrial art of Madinat al-Zahra than two small ivory chests made, according to the inscriptions on them, in the year 956. Other similar ones among those preserved must have come from the same workshop, even though there is no special indication of this.

Their art and great value saved them from destruction, and after containing the perfumes and jewels of members of the

caliph's family, they later served to keep relics in the treasure-rooms of Christian churches. One of the two chests found at Madinat al-Zahra is kept in the Museum of the Valencia de Don Juan Institute; the other in the church of the Fitero Monastery.

Particularly in the sewers, countless pieces of the table-ware used in the palaces have been found. By dint of patient labour, the pieces of one pot could be put together, and several others were reconstructed and are now exhibited in the store-rooms of the excavations.

Apart from the pieces of ordinary pottery, the majority have a coat of white glaze on the back, on which appear designs, drawn in dark brown manganese oxyde, of braid and chessboard patterns, floral ornaments, inscriptions and some human and animal figures painted in copper oxyde green.

There also appeared fragments of large and small cups and bowls of gilt pottery, i. e., of lustre ware with Abassid motifs, no doubt imported, and glass phials.

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